Sacred Journey

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

Winter 2011
vol. 62, no. 1

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SACRED JOURNEY

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

Fellowship in Prayer

encourages and supports
a spiritual orientation to life,

promotes the practice
of prayer, meditation,
and service to others,

and helps bring about
a deeper spirit of unity
among humankind.

SACRED JOURNEY
THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER
Winter 2011, vol. 62, no. 1

Fellowship In Prayer, Inc.
291 Witherspoon Street
Princeton, New Jersey 08542-3227

PHONE: 609-924-6863
FAX: 609-924-6910
WEBSITE: www.fellowshipinprayer.org
EMAIL: editorial@sacredjourney.org

Executive Director
JANET M. HAAG

Editorial Projects Manager
LISA M. CLAYTON

Media Services Specialist
DEEANN WEIR

Circulation Manager
LINDA D. BAUMANN

Cover Layout
SHARYN MURRAY

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Fellowship In Prayer, Inc.
291 Witherspoon Street
Princeton, NJ 08542-3227

Phone: 609-924-6863

Online: www.fellowshipinprayer.org

Submissions
We welcome submissions of articles on prayer, meditation, spiritual experience and practice, religious faith or similar topics, as well as prayers and poetry. We look for writing that expresses an individual's personal experience while also conveying a deeper message of universal appeal. Writing must be accessible to people of all traditions. Please include a brief biography and full contact information: name, address, phone numbers and email. Articles should not exceed 1500 words and should be submitted to the editor by email: submissions@sacredjourney.org. If necessary, they may be mailed.

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Dear Friend of Fellowship In Prayer:

At the end of 2010, I replaced my friend, Howard Ende, who had faithfully served as FIP board president for many years and I hope I can guide this organization with the spirit of wisdom and calmness that he was always able to invoke. Howard is somewhat of a hard act to follow but with the support of our able staff and our prestigious board I will do my best to help Fellowship In Prayer navigate the future in a way that will best serve the organization, its loyal members and subscribers, and enable its multi-faith message to be a shining beacon in a society where religious groups too often take an internal and xenophobic approach to advancing their causes and agendas.

I am not sure why I as a shopping center manager should have been chosen as the board president. The current board consists of a dean of religious life at Princeton University; the University's Muslim chaplain; the Director of Ministerial Formation life at Drew University; two very enlightened Buddhists; Howard Ende, the former president of FIP and former chief general council of Princeton University; as well as a professor of Semitic Studies, who has taught at both Harvard and Princeton, speaking no less than twenty-six languages and who is a leader of the Council of Elders in his native Ethiopia.

Growing up in England, I am the son of culturally Jewish parents, although I did have observant grandparents. At a fairly young age I was sent away to Stowe School, a Church of England boarding school, where I was obliged to attend daily chapel services. Although on Sundays, a man drove from London to give separate instruction to the ten to fifteen Jewish boys, like me, who also attended the school. In fact, my first exposure to inter-faith cooperation occurred when a disproportionate number of

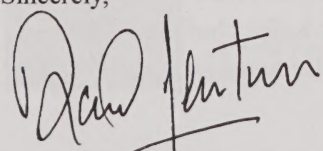
non-Jewish students started attending the Jewish service. The authorities, noting that the Jewish service ended a good fifteen to thirty minutes earlier than the Sunday chapel service, soon closed this loophole and this early interfaith experimentation was dealt a severe setback.

Somewhere in my late thirties, I am now 54, I started to rediscover my Jewish roots and identity. Slowly I commenced a return to living a more religiously observant life. In simple terms this means keeping kosher in a dietary sense; observing the Sabbath, the fasts and the holidays; wearing the four cornered garment known as *tzitzit*; regularly learning written and oral torah; and putting on *tefilin* (phylacteries) before praying in the morning, and praying in the afternoon and evening every day. My religious observance has become the central pillar in my existence and I am very motivated by an approach best articulated in verse 6 of the 105th psalm: "to search out God and God's strength; searching for God's presence at all times." In Judaism our approach to God is twofold: by praying we speak and by studying torah we listen; slowly our approach becomes refined, and we find God, our Creator, the source of Revelation and our Redeemer.

I count myself to be blessed with English roots, thirty years of American residency and a strong sense of my Jewish identity. I hope with this combined experience to help Fellowship In Prayer to expand in exciting new directions and achieve many goals, offering an approach to our multi-faith community where our individual religious identities and practices are understood and respected, and yet we can come together to promote peace, justice, compassion and other areas of mutual interest that will be enlightening and beneficial to all.

I am looking forward to this great challenge and opportunity.

Sincerely,



David S. Newton, *President*

Characters Unite

JANET M. HAAG

The other evening I happened to see a Characters Unite Public Service Announcement on the USA network in which Matt Bomer, star of "White Collar," called us to respect our religious and cultural differences and take a pledge for unity and understanding. His message seems simple enough but it is one we really need to hear and heed. I find it hopeful that it is being widely circulated through the mainstream media.

The United States reportedly has more religious groups than any other nation in the world and yet a significant number of the thousands of hate crimes committed here each year are motivated by religious bias. Why is it so difficult for us to live in the religious freedom on which this country was founded? In principle, we agree that we share the same basic rights, but in practice, we find it exceedingly difficult to make space for differences. We are passionate about our own religious freedom and more often than not, disinterested or even oppositional when it comes to others exercising their freedom in this regard.

It is fear that drives discrimination. We fear diminishment in the face of religious beliefs or cultural norms other than our own. The problem is the greater our fear and the tighter our stranglehold, the less life pulses through what we seek to preserve.

The struggle for religious liberty and civil rights are closely aligned and advocates for both must resist efforts to dismantle the wall between church and state, limiting free religious expression. The proposed Park 51 Islamic Center recently sparked a national debate about this topic. From the center of the firestorm, Feisal Rauf and Daisy Kahn challenged us to embrace religious pluralism if we really want to combat

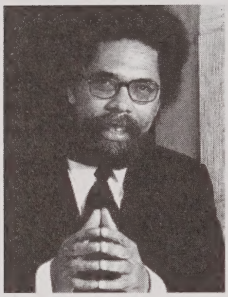
religious extremism. Understanding and accepting "otherness" to live in freedom requires tremendous courage.

Dr. Cornel West has forged a well-worn path of courageous advocacy for freedom and justice. He says, "You can't lead the people if you don't love the people and you can't save the people if you won't serve the people." And he says a great deal more in our featured interview!

As you read this issue of the journal, may you be prompted to think deeply about how the freedom with which you profess your religious convictions and engage in spiritual practice can lead you to live more justly in this world. There is tremendous wisdom in the call, Characters Unite. SJ

Janet M. Haag is the Executive Director of Fellowship In Prayer.

An Interview with Cornel West



One of America's most provocative and admired public intellectuals, Dr. Cornel West has been a champion for racial justice since childhood. He has been praised by The New York Times *for his "ferocious moral vision."*

Currently the Class of 1943 professor at Princeton University, Dr. West burst onto the national scene in 1993 with his best-selling book, Race Matters, *a searing analysis of racism in American democracy. He is the author of nineteen books and his long-awaited memoir, (published last year)* Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud, *is a compelling exploration of the heart behind the human mind. He continues to be a passionate civil rights activist, fiery orator, classical violinist, philosopher, and actor. He played a recurring role in the* Matrix *movie trilogy, for which he was an influential force in developing the story line, and its official spokesperson. He is a weekly commentator on Public Radio International's "The Tavis Smiley Show."*

Dr. West says he has never spent a weekend at home in Princeton. "I would like to be home, but my calling beckons me. I have places to go; from schools, to community centers to prisons to churches to mosques to universities to trade unions. There are academic lectures, political lectures, and religious lectures." He keeps this grueling schedule motivated by his desire to "touch minds and settle souls, instruct as well as delight." He provided FIP with an opportunity to speak with him while he was traveling. The ensuing conversation is a testimony to his genuineness and passion and you will no doubt find his words as compelling as we do.

Fellowship In Prayer: You have described yourself at various times as a Jesus-loving, free black man, what does this mean?

Cornel West: Well first—that's the truth! My identity as a Christian really zeroes in on that first century Palestinian Jew named Jesus, not only the Jesus of history but the Christ of faith who fundamentally changed my life, whose presence I can never deny or downplay His blood at the cross washed me, made me free from the seductions and temptations of the world or at least free enough to bear witness to a love and a truth that is always over against the world. When we become maladjusted to the worship of idols, we become indifferent to the suffering of others, and that's what the love of Jesus changes. It frees us up. It's made me free—and then of course, I'm a black man. I come from the distinct and rich tradition of a great people who have known great suffering and who have pursued the great cause of freedom with great style.

Were you raised in a religious home?

I grew up in a deeply Christian home. I was also shaped by the people at Shiloh Baptist Church—Wilty Cook, head of the deacon board, and Sarah Rameson, the Bible School teacher. I mean, for me, being a Christian is like having skin on my body.

So how do you nurture your commitment to Jesus on a daily basis as part of your pursuit of justice and peace?

Well, I try to have a very strong prayer life. I find that the spiritual striving goes hand in hand with political struggle—Almost every morning I listen to James Cleveland's wonderful song "A Good Day . . . and I thank God for it." Sometimes I listen to a little Dorothy Love Coates or Mahalia Jackson, say a prayer, and get moving.

What do you find inspirational about these songs?

Well, James Cleveland and Dorothy Love Coates keep it real. They tend to the folk of life and transfigure it by means of the power by the Holy Spirit, directing us to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And, I like the way they sing! Their style is a species of the historical struggle of a people who pursued their cause with great style.

What do you think is the distinctive gift of the African-American prayer tradition?

I think it is a magnificent eloquence! It's a love of language tied to the spiritual maturity, personal humility, and individual integrity that sit at the center of the best of the Black prayer tradition. In his book *Conversations with God*, James Melvin Washington gives us a unique and moving collection of prayers by African-Americans spanning two centuries that Coretta Scott King describes as "a powerful testament of faith and freedom."

How do you think spiritual practice is connected to the struggle for racial equality and social justice?

Well, in my own case, I cannot conceive of being a long distance runner in the struggle for freedom without the centrality of the spiritual life, the centrality of prayer. Now, I have a lot of secular comrades, atheists and agnostics, who don't pray at all and they still do marvelous work but I just don't understand their world. I don't know how they do it.

Do you teach your students that spirituality and justice go hand in hand?

Well, that's not my role as a professor at Princeton University.

I do talk about the history of figures who have advocated for justice like Dorothy Day, Martin King, Phillip Berrigan and others like Nelson Mandela who prayed in his prison cell in South Africa for twenty-seven years and eventually became the first South African president to be elected in a fully representative . democratic election. But I don't advocate for any particular religious view or proselytize. It's different when I speak specifically to Christian groups.

Since we are on this topic and you personally feel so strongly about the importance of spirituality in your advocacy for justice, what is your opinion about teaching religion or having a moment of prayer or silence in public schools?

I don't think the public school is the proper site for prayer. We need to teach our precious young people to pray in sacred spaces. They need to go to their churches, mosques and synagogues on the Sabbath and we need parents who are concerned about taking them there. A public school is the place where young people come together as citizens in the making and so we have atheists, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, as well as Christians. Any prayer is always in some way going to marginalize one of these groups. In public life we don't need this sort of thing. We can have conversations together in school about our respective religious traditions, but we don't need prayer. I don't have a problem with a moment of silence because silence is blank—you can say what you want to say, you can pray, you can think about a recording you like, whatever you want to do.

What do you say to those who use religion and religious values to justify oppression?

I say they are part of a long tradition of using religion as justi-

fication for subordination and degradation. So much of religion has been well adjusted to greed and well adjusted to bigotry and actually adjusted to mediocrity. Thank God there is also a prophetic tradition in the history of religion.

Do you think oppression in the name of religion is more or less prevalent in today's world?

I think it's about the same as it was in the past; it's always about the same. I think that in the Sixties, of course, we had great examples of religious faith in Martin Luther King and others but that was a very unique period of time. And even during Martin's day, you know most of the ministers and most of the churches, the vast majority of them, were just too scared to join him. I think it may have been in Montgomery that we had only fourteen out of eighty churches that supported Martin. We always have that fourteen and we always have that eighty, you know.

Are you saying that same kind of fear still exists today—that we "haven't learned our lesson?"

Yes I am! In fact that same kind of fear existed even during the time of Jesus. Judas betrayed him , and the other disciples kept silent, distant and aloof. If it weren't for the women, it would have been difficult to get the story out, you know what I mean? And not one of those women were disciples. So no, I believe it's a human condition that we have that each generation produces a cloud of witnesses who are willing to live and die for love, live and die for truth, live and die for justice.In that sense, it's not a matter of we haven't learned anything, the very fact that we still have a cloud of witnesses is, in and of itself a beautiful thing. It hasn't been snuffed out by all of the forces of greed and bigotry and insecurity and anxiety and fear.

A number of political conflicts in today's world are rooted in religious division. What do you think is the key to bringing people of different faiths together to create a sustainable peace?

I think the best thing we can do is to be examples; to be sensitive, compassionate, open-minded, love-centered persons in a way that causes people to take notice and maybe be inspired. In the end, I don't think peace is going to be achieved through abstract principles or some kind of grand reconciliation; it's going to come about through our bearing witness to what it means to be open and loving; in a variety of different denominations, a variety of different traditions. We need spiritual and moral revivals, awakenings. These take place through initiatives of the people, not through the coercive powers of government. We need a spiritual awakening that is a revival of non-market values like love, justice, trust and compassion.

During your "spiritual revivals" do you think it's hard to encourage trust, especially with African-Americans whose history demonstrates they have often been placed in positions that tend to evoke mistrust?

I'm not so sure about that. Black people have probably trusted in the possibility of America more than any other group under the circumstances. It's amazing. Of course, now in the age of President Obama—with the presence of a black family in the White House—we have even more trust in America. I think this is one reason, you see, why they say black people are happier than any other group right now. Of course, we're also catching more hell. That's because we have this symbolic presence in the White House that is unprecedented.

So having a black president would be a pinnacle of achievement?

Absolutely! We are experiencing an unmatched achievement that generates a certain kind of trust in the government. How long this will last, we don't know.

What is your prayer for our world today?

My, it's hard to have just one prayer; it's a good question though. I would pray for more people to have more courage to think critically, more courage to love intensely, more courage to hope sincerely. I think this would help to alleviate poverty and much of the social misery in the world. I would also pray to heal the wounds in people's hearts and souls that are not reduced to politics but subject to misfortune and bad luck.

That is beautiful! Dr. West, it has been my pleasure to talk with you. Thank you so very much.

Well thank you for facilitating this conversation and stay strong now, you hear?

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THE CONQUEST OF WAR AND THE PURSUIT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE . . . MUST BECOME OUR GRAND PREOCCUPATION AND MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION.
NORMAN COUSINS

Charity is no substitute for justice withheld.
ST. AUGUSTINE

OVERCOMING POVERTY IS NOT A GESTURE OF CHARITY; IT IS AN ACT OF JUSTICE. IT IS THE PROTECTION OF A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT, THE RIGHT TO DIGNITY AND A DECENT LIFE.
NELSON MANDELA

I'M FOR TRUTH, NO MATTER WHO TELLS IT. I'M FOR JUSTICE, NO MATTER WHO IS AGAINST IT.
MALCOLM X

Let us never cease to feel compassion for those in want. Let us never tire of helping victims of injustice and oppression. One who puts faith in the restoration of human dignity cannot be wrong.
POUL HARTLING

UNTIL THE GREAT MASS OF PEOPLE SHALL BE FILLED WITH THE SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR EACH OTHER'S WELFARE, SOCIAL JUSTICE CAN NEVER BE ATTAINED.

HELEN KELLER

Justice is sweet and musical;
but injustice is harsh and discordant.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

ON THREE THINGS THE WORLD STANDS:
ON JUDGMENT, ON TRUTH, AND ON PEACE.

PIRKEI AVOT 1:18

THE MORE WE LET EACH VOICE
SING OUT WITH ITS OWN TRUE TONE,
THE RICHER WILL BE THE DIVERSITY
OF THE CHANT IN UNISON.

ANGELUS SILESIUS

What we would like to do is change the world—make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe and shelter themselves as God intended for them to do.

DOROTHY DAY

Gratitude

MARY ANNE RADMACHER

I hold gratitude deeply. It rumbles around in my soul, and it comes tumbling out as laughter. The capacity to experience gratitude in all circumstances is tied, experientially, to laughter and laughing. In moments when I am disconnected to my sense of gratitude, laughter is a path to walk me there. Laughter opens the window of perspective that then allows gratitude to blow into the musty corners of my being. Perhaps laughter is tied to a different quality in your life experience? What qualities does laughter draw out in you?

Steve Maraboli, host of "Empowered Living Radio," said to me, "It's the best kind of tired when at the end of the day you've left it on the field and all your pockets are empty." This is not a negative statement, but a reference to giving your all. The way news is broadcast in this country is material for a very difficult conversation. "The news" carries such an intrinsic negative message that when we have news of the positive sort, we must qualify it by saying, "Now here's the good news."

Cultivate the habit of telling friends what has gone right, what is worth noting for its joy and lesson and verve. Join in conversations with, "Something like that happened to me once," and if it must be about a disaster, then make sure the story you tell includes something about a disaster averted, not just a disaster. Bad news is, of course, present in every life experience. It knows how to take up plenty of room on its own. I figure, why make even larger space for it by telling tales of woes? I'd rather aspire to speaking of all that has gone well.

Even in facing the most difficult circumstances with my friend D. R. when she was engaged with two different types of invasive cancer, we found the road of laughter connected to gratitude. She is the first to acknowledge that her sense of humor

and finding things to laugh about lined her path of healing and recovery. I remember vividly our jolly exchange the day her doctor suggested nuclear medicine (literally injecting her with radioactive isotopes) as a treatment for her stage-three cancer. Pondering the implications, she seriously asked her doctor, "Does this mean I won't have to use my night-light for a few weeks?" Laughter has allowed D. R. to see things that have gone well, even on some of the worst days of her illness.

My friend Mollyshannon recounted to me what elements of a public presentation of mine had really stayed with her. I appreciated hearing how she heard my words as she quoted back to me:

> You tell the tale of your life by the stories you repeat in your days. Does this mean my life is absent of difficulties? Of course not. I have health challenges and issues with finances and friends who are ill. My life is filled with elements that are less than ideal. But that is not the story I tell. That is not what I spend my emotional investments on. The story I tell is the story of recovery, discovery and uncovering. Those are the stories I repeat in my days.

The really good stories bear repeating . . . and those are the stories of laughter that lead me to my sense of gratitude. Joy is everywhere. It takes open eyes to see it and an open heart to appreciate it.

I promised myself to see words. I'm due to complete a project, and I was pretty sure at the start of the day that I was promising to fold myself utterly into my task. Ahhh. I also told myself that meant no second-guessing; no turning away of ideas, and everything would be considered. And all of those ideas that wanted to be considered came knocking. Quickly. They arrived as if by a magic invitation. Dang. It's just that I thought I invited words that would be written in my book and what I got instead were words of adventure and joy lived out in the experience of my day.

Rather than turning to the dark side of expectation and disappointment, that nasty one-two punch, I opened myself to the whole winter solstice day. I gave and was gifted with words. Better than what I could have imagined. I had the heart to see the words that came courting. They indeed were everywhere. Just not dressed as I initially anticipated. They were dressed in experience and fun opportunity. And so it was with laughter. We all experience things that are only funny when we look back on them. The real joy occurs when we can laugh in the midst of the experience, as it unfolds.

In her unfolding recovery, my friend D.R. hopped on an electric-scooter shopping cart. She'd been bed-bound for over two weeks and her cabin fever got the best of her and her care-

> There are some things so serious you have to laugh at them.
>
> ~Niels Bohr

giver. They went for what seemed like a simple shopping expedition. D.R. quipped that she was already nuclear-powered by virtue of the medicine that had been pumped into her veins, and she charged off on that scooter with the same high-powered verve! Even though the end-cap display of canned green beans was the visible evidence of the tight corner she turned, and product was splayed all over the grocery store floor, D.R. could not keep from laughing. Her caregiver slipped aisles away in an effort to control her laughing fit. Even the store employee whose job it would be to recover all the cans saw the humor in the event. It has produced a new nickname, and we're talking about the source of an excellent children's story found in the expanded tales of *Scooter G. Beanes.*

To live an obligation-free life; serve the debts of history and the promise of the future; bring harm to no one; live with profound meaning and positive impact; be willing to see an old

thing in a new way; be willing to be financially rewarded for sincere and authentic effort. Stand ready to be utterly healthy and completely responsible to wellness; cultivate and maintain a strong immune system and a consistent energy; embrace the structures that guarantee strength and wellness and continually build upon them with information and knowledge. Express gratitude for all the influences in life. Ease into the natural embrace and flow of the day and maintain a cadence that is realistic and reflects your fundamental intentions.

A revived threat arrived in the mail, announcing intended legal action on an issue I thought was long ago put to rest, many issues impacting my health and wellness remain unresolved. And yet I had a great day. I took appropriate action on those large, looming issues and then gave myself to the next thing in my day. I have lived another way—the way in which the yet unresolved issues cloud my joy and muddied the colors of my garden. I choose this better way. I relaxed into the natural embrace of the day. I enjoyed the many gifts that came my way. I recognize that those challenges will again call my name. And when they do, I will answer them at that time, in that day.

Mary Anne Radmacher is a writer and artist. She conducts workshops on living a full, creative, balanced life; teaches internet writing seminars; and works with individual clients. She has been using her writing to explore symbols and find meaning since she was a child. You may visit her online at www.maryanneradmacher.com.
Excerpted from her new book, *Live With Intention: Rediscovering What We Already Know*, and used with permission. Conari Press © 2011 www.conaripress.com

Living Flame

DAVID SERMERSHEIM

living flame
· breathe the life of your light
into my weary soul

cover me with the
warmth of your gentle glow

lead me to the
center of the flame that

has fled me now
as I flounder and grapple

with remaining strength
ebbing from the core

unable to find what
has flown from me

guide me to the inner source of light
burning brighter as it grows weaker

Living Flame was written in church as a meditation during a difficult period in David's life. His work has appeared in a number of poetry journals. He writes for pure pleasure; observing and reflecting on what matters. Retired after forty years of teaching, he lives in central CT.

© istockphoto.com/adamkaz

Amnesia

RALPH SINGH

We have forgotten our selves
We no longer recognize our being
More importantly we no longer recognize You
It was You all along sitting before us—standing next to us
Holding us up
Calling to us from across the crowd

We forgot the sound of Your Voice
Confused falsehood for truth
Forgot the beauty of Your eyes
Confused hatred with love
Forgot the fragrance
Of Your presence
Confused the putrid with purity

Open my eyes that I may see
Open my ears that I may hear
Open my nose that I may breathe

A Fresh, a new, again
That I remember who I am
And what I am called to do
And why I was called into being
Your name—not mine—echoing eternally

Ralph Singh is an Interfaith Education Advocate chairing numerous interfaith committees and the author of several books. His latest project is an audio CD of wisdom stories from eleven faith traditions titled *Stories to Light Our Way, Journey to the World of God*. It is Ralph's privilege to be the first foreign devotee of Baba Viras Singh. To learn more you may visit www.exploringspirituality.com

O God, Slow Us Down

GEORGE THOMAS

O God, slow us down and help us to see that we are put in charge of our lives, but with thy help. Help us to get in tune with the rhythm that makes for life.

We keep moving, even though we know that we are made to center down, as well as to be actively engaged in the business of life. We compete for things and make those things more important than they ought to be. We eat what we ought not to eat. We neglect and misuse our bodies. We fail to discipline our minds and to be still and know that thou art God and that we are the temple of the Most High. Yet we often complain about our misfortunes and our hard luck, when at times it is we who are guilty of disregard.

Help us to know that we can be broken by life only if we first allow the victory of evil over our spirits.

May our hope and strength and faith be grounded in you; and may we recall the strength of our model, our brother and your Son. Amen.

From *Conversations With God, Two Centuries of Prayers by African-Americans*, edited by James Melvin Washington, Ph.D. Harper Collins ©1994.

Baking With My Mother

TERESA CASTALDI

One of the constants of my life growing up in New York City was the aromatic bouquet of freshly made baked goods combined with the smells of a hearty Italian dinner wafting from my mother's kitchen. At home, my mother divided her time between food preparation, household chores and the rearing of two children. Scrumptious cakes, cookies, donuts, pastries and other mouth watering treats floated out of her oven and onto the plates of her eagerly awaiting family. A dark haired, cozy figure with a brightly colored apron and warm smile, my mother wielded a wooden spoon, spatula, or other kitchen tool with the aplomb of a conductor, always striking the right note, making it seem so easy. Mom's movements were quick and agile as she simultaneously juggled worn pans in and out of the oven, stirred delectable sauces or whipped cream.

You felt loved when you savored a bite of my mother's apple crumb pie or Italian rum cake. Family, friends and neighbors all came to the proverbial plate to share in the gustatory experience. Quite often, my mother would be asked to bring one of her signature cakes or pies or make a pan of lasagna for a neighbor's special event. "Do you like it, honey?" she would eagerly ask whoever was flecking a crumb off a lip. "How about some more? You didn't have enough." Woe to the person who was truly stuffed, for my mother would quickly dole out a second or sometimes third helping onto their plate. And if available, she'd add a dollop of ice cream or homemade whipped cream. The spirit of *abbondanza*, abundance, and love embraced those who were the lucky recipients of her offerings.

My mother's cooking and baking was part of the fabric

of our childhood. Pots and pans banging and clanging in the kitchen were background noise as my brother and I did our homework, watched TV or played inside. Mom would often interrupt our playing to ask us to help. Brightly colored streaks of sugar festooned our faces as we worked by her side, decorating cookies with shimmering tints, nuts and chocolate chips. As we gained proficiency, we graduated to stirring hot liquids on the stove and eventually to frosting cakes and cupcakes. On these days when the bitter cold of a wintry New York City day would keep us indoors, my mother would immediately preheat the oven and start baking, whereas I would happily occupy myself by reading any book that could take me as far away as possible from our apartment to another era and place. I viewed my mother's calls for assistance as annoying, bothersome interruptions when I had to put down a favorite story. I'm embarrassed to say that she often had to call me more than once before I would awake from my reverie and leave the world of my imagination to emerge into the kitchen.

One of my mother's favorite anecdotes was how her father had bought her a set of pots and pans and baking utensils when she was nine years old with which she then produced delicious cakes for her family. In my adolescent brilliance, I poohpoohed this tale as totally unimpressive and uninteresting. "How boring," I thought to myself. True, my mother often worked outside our home, but she wasn't Madame Curie, after all. Nor was she running for office or preparing to become an astronaut. My standards were high: cooking and baking were not necessarily noteworthy achievements. They were just the everyday tasks of life, something you did, just as you brushed your teeth and straightened up your room. Sure, the results of her efforts were delicious, but after all, what did baking have to do with scholarship and my desire

to explore this great big world?

As I grew into adulthood thoughts were always of something other than cooking and baking, and so I entered the world with little consideration of recipes but with a thirst for knowledge which would eventually lead me into my career. As an adult I did cook and entertain family and friends and I relied on my mother for her recipes but cooking never swept me away until certain life events put me in a position to bake and cook with a renewed intensity. Over a span of two and a half years, I underwent open heart surgery and cared for my late husband and mother, both of whom died within ten months of each other. To say my life was shattered by these losses is an understatement.

In an attempt to put myself back on my feet and nourish my own depleted body and spirit, I decided to make several drastic changes in my diet, including eschewing wheat and going gluten free. Now most gluten free baked goods are tasteless items with the consistency of gritty sawdust. That is, until I discovered blanched almond flour. Soon, all sorts of delicious treats started to emerge from my oven—muffins, breads and even cakes—all made with almond flour and containing no sugar or dairy. Baking with this ingredient soon became my obsession. In three months, I went through fifteen pounds of almond flour as I shared my delicacies with family and friends. Each week, a block of time was devoted to baking. I bought new pans and reorganized my pantry, stockpiling a variety of nuts, seeds, currants, raisins and dried fruit. Salt became important and I turned a discerning eye towards the different types available and how their various properties influenced my baked goods. An epiphany occurred when I purchased a new oven to replace the twenty-five- year-old relic that graced my kitchen but produced less than perfect results.

A month or two into my baking frenzy, I noticed something. There was a distinctive rhythm to my motions,

a mindfulness of each step that was very similar to my mother's. I measured, poured, whisked, melted and stirred with intensity. My baking had become a fluid, almost meditative activity. I was slowly becoming my mother and perhaps she had known something I didn't until now. Baking, like meditation, brings a sense of order into the chaos of daily living. Not only does it demand concentration and presence, but it provides a bit of a sanctuary. The process of making a cake creates a shift in awareness. You become absorbed in the task at hand, not thinking about yesterday or tomorrow, but giving your attention to the bread or cake, focusing on the bowl in front of you.

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I had been "chopping wood and carrying water" without being conscious of my activity. Perhaps my mother had grasped a simple truth from a very young age that when you cook and bake with attentiveness, when you nourish yourself and others with good, beautifully presented food you are bestowing one of life's greatest gifts. As my own adventures in baking progressed, I had to smile when I remembered my adolescent disdain for this seemingly humble pursuit. I realized with clarity the great dignity of my mother's actions.

St. Therese of Liseux, my namesake, is said to be the saint of little ways. No matter how small the task, my

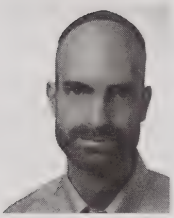
mother, like St. Therese, did it right and did it with love. Her attention to detail yielded splendid culinary creations. Every cookie was delicately decorated; every cake was picture perfect. Her homemade pizza was as beautiful to look at as it was tasty to the palate. Every precious morsel she brought to the table was beautifully crafted to nourish the soul and the appetite. My mother poured her heart into the smallest of antipasti and the largest of roasts. We tasted her love; we felt it. We were truly blessed.

I think of my beloved mother every single day, and especially now whenever I'm baking and cooking. I like to think her spirit is with me as I stir and sift, steam and sauté. I imagine her smiling as she watches her daughter mirror her moves, preparing a wondrous gift. SJ

Teresa Castaldi, Ph.D., an educational consultant, writer and sometimes photographer, currently lives in Princeton, NJ. She particularly cherishes her memories of growing up in New York City and, later on, teaching in Asia for the University of Maryland and studying in India on a Fulbright scholarship. It's those experiences as well as an abiding love of nature, family and friends that helped shape her world view, and for that, she's eternally grateful.

Water on Stone

JUSTUS BAIRD



Rabbi Justus N. Baird is the Director of the Center for Multifaith Education at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York City. He oversees the seminary's multifaith programming, preparing religious leaders for service in a religiously diverse world. Rabbi Baird graciously stepped in to replace Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman on the multifaith panel at the conference. We were indeed blessed to have Rabbi Baird join us. His words of hope and challenge in the pursuit of justice are recounted here.

It is an honor to fill the shoes of the great teacher and great scholar Dr. Larry Hoffman. I studied with him in rabbinical school. He continues to mentor me to this day in my own writing and scholarship. The mission of Auburn Seminary in New York is to equip bold and resilient leaders who bridge religious divides, build community, pursue justice and heal the world; and I hope that all of us here at this conference will be able to pursue that mission.

A story is told of Rabbi Akiva, a great second century sage of the Talmud, that when he was forty-years-old he had never studied one word of Torah. One day he was standing at a well and saw water dripping from this well onto a stone. He noticed the shape of the stone—it had been hollowed out like a bowl, and he asked, "How did this stone get shaped like a bowl?" Someone standing nearby him said, "Rabbi Akiva, haven't you heard that in the book of Job that water can wear away stone? It's the constant drip of water day after day that created the hollow in the rock." So Rabbi Akiva at that moment realized, "Is my own mind harder than stone? Surely I should go and study at least one section of Torah." And so he learned the

Hebrew letters one by one like water dripping on a stone and years later became perhaps one of the greatest Jewish sages recorded in the Talmud. Like water on stone, study is a critical spiritual practice in Jewish tradition. And this spiritual practice introduces us to what I think is perhaps the most profound idea in Jewish tradition that teaches us about transformative social justice or transformative social engagement. And that simple idea is that the way things are is not the way that they have to be. The way things have always been is not the way that they always have to be. And so in my brief remarks, I'd like to introduce two other Jewish spiritual practices, the practices of ritual and prayer that I think embody this teaching and then close with a challenge that injustice around the world presents to our religious traditions today.

One spiritual practice I want to mention is ritual. One of the most celebrated Jewish rituals is the Passover Seder, the ritual meal. The core narrative of the Passover Seder is that once we were slaves, and now we are free. In every generation we are taught that we should act as if we ourselves had been slaves, as if we ourselves had been brought into freedom, by reminding ourselves that year after year we were once slaves but then our lives changed and that then we became free. In a perfect world, we Jews would internalize empathy for the less fortunate, intolerance for injustice and a basic understanding that the way things are is not the way that they have to be. This is a core message of the Passover Seder: if you were once a slave, then you should be able to act morally, because you know what it's like to be oppressed, you know what it's like to be the one who's the underdog.

The Talmud teaches that remembering leads to action. The remembering of being a slave whether it was a generation ago or a hundred generations ago is a critical step towards transformative social action.

The second spiritual practice I want to mention is prayer, and here I am drawing on the material that Dr. Hoffman would

have talked about were he here. Consider briefly the blessings before and after Jews eat a meal of bread. There is an oddity to this prayer that we say before and after eating food. The blessing that we recite, *hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz,* thanking God for bringing forth bread from the earth is a bit strange. Last time I checked there was no bread coming forth from the earth at all. There might be some of the ingredients of bread coming forth from the earth, but, as anyone who has made bread from scratch knows, that unlike carrots or grapes or many other wonderful vegetables and fruits, bread does not grow forth from the earth. It takes an incredible amount of work and time and preparation to prepare and bake bread. So why does this blessing say, "Thank you God for bringing forth bread from the earth?"

> We must work together to mine the wisdom of our religious traditions.

Similarly, in the blessing after the meal, we thank God for nourishing everyone and everything. Here too we might wonder, "Last time I checked, God is not nourishing everybody in the world—there are millions and millions of people who go hungry to bed every night. So why is it that we would thank God for feeding everyone in the world when God is not doing that today?" An answer to this conundrum might be found in a *midrash* about the Garden of Eden. In this midrash, Adam and Eve are in the Garden of Eden, and there were actually giant bread trees that were as tall as the cedars of Lebanon. And in this midrash, when Adam or Eve is hungry, one of them can simply walk up to a bread tree and take some bread. In other words, in Paradise, bread actually does grow on trees. So maybe the way we should understand these pre- and post-meal blessings is to see them simply as a description of the world to

come. That one day, bread will grow forth from the earth. That one day everyone will be nourished with food. The tendency to imagine what things will be like in the world to come, to imagine a more perfect world, is a critical step, I believe, in transformative social justice. The vision of a just world that is described in these simple blessings before every meal and after every meal is a constant reminder of the world we are trying to create. And so this is one of the core functions of prayer: to point us in the right direction, to teach us that the world as it is, is incomplete; it is imperfect and indeed, it can be different. So I've tried to show briefly in three Jewish spiritual practices; study, ritual and prayer, this central idea to transformative social justice that the world could be different. And the reason I've focused on this teaching, or this meta-narrative if you will of Jewish tradition, is because I believe that perhaps the single greatest enemy to great social justice work is simply the sense that the way the world is, is the way it should be, that it means ought, that today should be our model for tomorrow. One of the key functions of our religious traditions is to show otherwise.

I'd like to close with a challenge—a challenge of the modern religious person. I'd like to introduce the challenge with a text from the book of Deuteronomy. In the opening of Chapter 21 in the book of Deuteronomy we read about the situation of a corpse that is lying in a field between towns. In this case, no one knows who committed the crime, and no one knows who's responsible for this body. The ritual the text requires of us in this situation is to slaughter a heifer, and then bring the elders from the nearest town to this place and require them to make a public declaration. This is the declaration that they're required to make: "Our hands have not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done." These are the words that they are required to say. Why do they have to do this declaration? I live here in Princeton, NJ. Could I imagine a body being found in Carnegie Lake, down the hill from here, and asking the mayor of Princeton to go down to the bridge on Washington Road and declare, "I didn't do this?" That's a little weird. But there is a

way of understanding this teaching. Perhaps the declaration, "Our eyes did not see it," is a way of saying, "We did not know this happened. We did not know about this body." And by implication, it may mean that if we had seen something, if we had known, this body would have entered our universe of obligation. It would have entered our universe of required activity.

Today with 24/7 news coverage and the internet, we see and know about tragedies all over the world. We see dead bodies in every place in the world. According to Jewish tradition, knowing about these tragedies brings us into the universe of responsibility for them. Feeling responsible for so many tragedies inevitably leads us to question our priorities, to ask what is the best use of our limited capacities, and to admit our susceptibility to compassion fatigue. One of the great challenges to our generation of faith-inspired social activists is how we guide ourselves and others to face the challenge of knowing about, of feeling responsible for the countless injustices that we will never be able to address. We must work together to mine the wisdom of our religious traditions, to find ways to give people hope in the face of overwhelming injustice and to bring justice where there is injustice, not only in other parts of the world but also in our backyard. SJ

The Habit of Escape

PEMA CHÖDRÖN

It seems we all have the tendency to move away from the present moment. It's as if this habit is built into our DNA. At the most basic level, we think all the time and this takes us away. In his teachings on the difference between fantasy and reality, Chögyam Trungpa said that being fully present, having contact with the immediacy of our experience, is reality. Fantasy he described as being lost in thought. All those people driving on the freeway at 85 miles per hour: most of them are distracted. Apparently we have some kind of automatic pilot that keeps us on the road, or keeps us multitasking, or eating, or all the other things we do quite mindlessly. This pattern of distracting ourselves, of not being fully present, of not contacting the immediacy of our experience is considered normal.

From a Buddhist perspective, lifetime after lifetime we've been strengthening this habit of distraction. If you don't buy the idea of rebirth, just this lifetime is enough to see how we do it. Since we were children, we've strengthened the habit of escape, choosing fantasy over reality. Unfortunately we get a lot of comfort from leaving, from being lost in our thoughts, worries and plans. It gives us a sense of false security and we enjoy it.

There is a very useful teaching, which I heard from Dzigar Kongtrül, that allows us to take a closer look at this knee-jerk pattern of moving away from being present. This is the teaching on *shenpa*. Generally the Tibetan word shenpa is translated "attachment," but that has always seemed too abstract to me, as it doesn't touch the magnitude of shenpa and the effect it has on us.

An alternate translation

might be "hooked"—what it feels like to get hooked—what it feels like to be stuck. Everyone likes to hear teachings on getting unstuck because they address such a common source of pain. In terms of the poison-ivy metaphor—our fundamental itch and the habit of scratching—shenpa is the itch and it's also the urge to scratch. The urge to smoke that cigarette, the urge to overeat, to have one more drink, to say something cruel or to tell a lie.

Here's how shenpa shows up in everyday experiences. Somebody says a harsh word and something in you tightens: instantly you're hooked. That tightness quickly spirals into blaming the person or denigrating yourself. The chain reaction of speaking or acting or obsessing happens fast. Maybe, if you have strong addictions, you go right for your addiction to cover over the uncomfortable feelings. This is very personal. What was said gets to you—it triggers you. It might not bother someone else at all, but we're talking about what touches your sore place—that sore place of shenpa.

The fundamental, most basic shenpa is to ego itself: attachment to our identity, the image of who we think we are. When we experience our identity as being threatened, our self-absorption gets very strong and shenpa automatically arises. Then there is the spin-off—such as attachment to our possessions or to our views and opinions. For example, someone criticizes you. They criticize your politics, they criticize your appearance, they criticize your dearest friend. And shenpa is right there. As soon as the words have registered—boom, it's there. Shenpa is not the thoughts or emotions per se. Shenpa is preverbal, but it breeds thoughts and emotions very quickly. If we're attentive, we can feel it happening.

If we catch it when it first arises, when it's just a tightening, a slight pulling back, a feeling of beginning to get hot under the

collar, it's very workable. Then we have the possibility of becoming curious about this urge to do the habitual thing, this urge to strengthen a repetitive pattern. We can feel it physically and, interestingly enough, it's never new. It always has a familiar taste. It has a familiar smell. When you begin to get in touch with shenpa, you feel like this has been happening forever. It allows you to feel the underlying insecurity that is inherent in a changing shifting, impermanent world—an insecurity that is felt by everyone as long as we continue to scramble to get ground under our feet.

When someone says something that triggers you, you don't really have to go into the history of why you're triggered. This is not self-analysis, an exploration of what the trauma was. It's just, "Uh-oh," and you feel yourself tightening. Generally speaking, we don't catch it when it first arises. It's more common to be well into acting out or repressing by the time we realize that we're caught.

Dzigar Kongtrül says that shenpa is the charge behind emotions, behind thoughts and words. For instance, when words are imbued with shenpa, they easily become hate words. Any word at all can be transformed into a racial slur, into the language of aggression, when it has the force and charge of shenpa behind it. You say the shenpa word and it produces shenpa in others, who then respond defensively. When left unchecked, shenpa is similar to a highly contagious disease and it spreads rapidly.

There's a word that is currently used to dehumanize people in the Middle East. I've heard that United States soldiers are taught it before they go there. The word is *haji*. One serviceman told me it's common to hear, "it's okay, they're just haji," as a justification for mistreating or killing innocent civilians. The poignant thing is that in Islamic culture the word has a very positive connotation. It is the honorific term for one who has made the

pilgrimage to the sacred site of Mecca. So words themselves are neutral, it's the charge we add to them that matters. When there's shenpa, the word haji dehumanizes people. It becomes the language of hatred and violence. Without that charge, without that heat, the same word produces completely different reactions in the hearts and minds of those who hear it.

We all use shenpa words. We may try never to use those that are outright racial slurs, but we have our ways of deriding others. When you don't like someone, even their

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name can become a shenpa word. For instance, when you speak of your lifelong rival, Jane, or your brother, Bill, whom you loathe, the very tone of voice with which you say their name conveys disdain and aggression.

You can notice shenpa very easily in other people. You're having a conversation with somebody and they are right with you listening. Then, after something you say, you see them tense. Somehow you know you just touched a sensitive area. You're seeing their shenpa, but they may not be aware of it at all.

When we see clearly what's happening to another person, we have access to our natural intelligence. We know instinctively that the important thing we are trying to communicate will not get through right now. The person is shutting down, he or she is closing off because of shenpa. Our natural wisdom tells us to be quiet and not push our point; we intuitively know that no one will win if we spread the virus of shenpa.

Whenever there's discomfort or restlessness or boredom—whenever there's insecurity in any form—shenpa clicks in. This is true for us all. If we become familiar with it, we can fully experience that unease. We can fully experience the shenpa and learn over time that it's in everyone's best interest not to act it out.

> My mind and heart are closed. I'm so invested in my views and opinions that those who think differently are my adversaries.

Not acting out, or refraining is very interesting. It's also called renunciation in the Buddhist teachings. The Tibetan word for renunciation is *shenluk*, and it means turning shenpa upside down, shaking it up

completely. It means getting unhooked. Renunciation isn't about renouncing food or sex or your lifestyle. We're not referring to giving up the things themselves. We're talking about loosening our attachment, the shenpa we have to these things.

In general, Buddhism encourages us never to reject what is problematic but rather to become very familiar with it. And so it is here we are urged to acknowledge our shenpa, see it clearly, experience it fully—without acting out or repressing.

If we are willing to acknowledge our shenpa and to experience it without sidetracks, then our natural intelligence begins to guide us. We begin to foresee the whole chain reaction and where it will lead. There's some wisdom that becomes accessible to us—wisdom based on compassion for oneself and others that has nothing to do with ego's fears. It's the part of us that knows we can connect and live from our basic goodness, our basic intelligence, openness and warmth. Over time, this knowledge becomes a stronger force than the shenpa and we naturally interrupt the chain reaction before it even starts. We naturally become able to prevent an epidemic of aggression before it even begins.

In my own training, I have always been instructed not to get caught up in accepting and rejecting, not to get caught by a biased mind. Chögyam Trungpa was particularly emphatic about this. At one time, this presented a question for me: Did it mean I should not have preferences such as liking one kind of flower or one kind of food far better than another? Was it problematic not to like the taste of raw onions or the smell of patchouli oil? Or to feel more at home with Buddhism than with another philosophy or religion?

When I heard the teaching on shenpa, my dilemma was resolved. The issue isn't with preferences but with the shenpa behind

them. If I get worked up when presented with raw onions, if the very sight of them triggers aversion in me, then the bias is deep. I'm clearly hooked. If I start an anti-raw-onion campaign or write an anti-patchouli-oil book or begin to attack another philosophy or religion, then it's shenpa, big time. My mind and heart are closed. I'm so invested in my views and opinions that those who think differently are my adversaries. I become a fundamentalist: one who feels strongly that I am right and who closes my mind to those who think otherwise. On the other hand, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi are both examples of how we can take a stand and speak out without shenpa. As they demonstrated, being without shenpa does not lead to complacency, it leads to open-mindedness and compassionate action.

Of course, we get hooked by positive experiences as well as negative experiences. When we really want something, shenpa is usually there. This becomes a fairly common experience for meditators. You meditated and you felt a settling, a calmness, a sense of wellbeing. Maybe thoughts came and went, but they didn't seduce you and you were able to come back to the present. There wasn't a sense of struggle. So, ironically, then you get attached to your success. "I did it right, I got it right, that's how it should always be. That's the model." But it wasn't "right" or "good," it was just what it was. Because of shenpa, you get hooked by positive experience.

Then the next time you meditate, you obsess about someone at home, some unfinished project at work, something delicious to eat. You worry and you fret, or you feel fear or craving, and when you try to rope in your wild-horse mind, it refuses to be tamed. At the end you feel like it was a horrible meditation and you condemn yourself because you've failed. But it wasn't "bad." It was just what it was. Because of shenpa, you get attached to

a self-image of failure. That's where it gets sticky.

The sad part is that all we're trying to do is not feel that underlying uneasiness. The sadder part is that we proceed in such a way that the uneasiness only gets worse. The message here is that the only way to ease our pain is to experience it fully. Learn to stay. Learn to stay with uneasiness, learn to stay with the tightening, learn to stay with the itch and urge of shenpa, so that the habitual chain reaction doesn't continue to rule our lives, and the patterns that we consider unhelpful don't keep getting stronger as the days and months and years go by. Someone once sent me a bone-shaped dog tag that you could wear on a cord around your neck. Instead of a dog's name, it said, "Sit. Stay. Heal." We can heal ourselves and the world by training in this way.

Once you see what you do, how you get hooked, and how you get swept away, it's hard to be arrogant. This honest recognition softens you up, humbles you in the best sense. It also begins to give you confidence in your basic goodness. When we are not blinded by the intensity of our emotions, when we allow a bit of space, a chance for a gap, when we pause, we naturally know what to do. We begin, due to our own wisdom, to move toward letting go and fearlessness. Due to our own wisdom, we gradually stop strengthening habits that only bring more pain to the world.

Pema Chödrön is an American Buddhist nun in the lineage of Chogyam Trungpa, the renowned Tibetan meditation master. She is a teacher at Gampo Abbey, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, the first Tibetan monastery in North America established for Westerners. She is the author of five books, including *Taking the Leap: Freeing Ourselves from Old Habits and Fears* from which this excerpt is taken and used with permission © 2009 Shambhala Publications, Inc., www.shambhala.com

The Nature of Things

JEAN COURTNEY HUBER

My life and times are far removed from The Garden of Eden. But like Eve tasting the fruit of the forbidden tree, I too, seek to visualize and taste God's gifts up close, see and feel their wonders; even sample luscious golden apples ready for the taking.

As a tiny tot, curious and inquisitive, wanting to learn about life first hand, I walked in the windblown prairies of the Midwest. Cowbirds with their noisy squawks had me jumping along with bouncing bunnies as they rushed to escape the birds' pecking. I wondered why God made cowbirds so noisy and bunnies so skittish. Then I saw the butterflies—"Monarchs," Mama said. I fell in love with them. When I heard a rushing sound, I was drawn to its source and I discovered one of God's great gifts. His river, Mother Mississippi.

Too young to absorb its miracles, I grow in years and return, this time carrying an artist's easel and yellow ochre oil ready to capture on canvas the golden reflections of the river's eddy swirling near shore. Billows of white clouds appear above and ornament the blue sky. I reach for cobalt blue, put brush to canvas here in the left bank near the bend in the river. I ask myself: "Is this heaven?"

The scene changes. I realize capturing God's beauty is beyond my artistic talents. Still, I can't resist the pull of God's River or His palette of gifts. Mother Mississippi tempts me. I want to know more. I plan a trip, foolish me. I decide to traipse Nature's centerfold from its beginning in a quiet brook near Lake Itasca, Minnesota, follow the Mississippi river southward, wondering at its twists and turns, its palette of heavenly colors reflected in the river's soul. I realize why the pull of the waters brought Lewis and Clarke to the river's shore. Their "need to

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know" was worlds beyond the explorer's imagination—and mine. Perhaps God tugged at their hearts as he tugged at mine.

Oops, I come to a bend in the river—where Mother Mississippi, who quenches the prairie's thirst, decides to travel west. Here the river surprises me, turns, heads west as it bends. God slowed it down a bit, added a few islands and some rough water. Near old Fort Armstrong, the dangerous rapids at Rock Island, Illinois hold waters full of rocks and deep pools that scuttled many an explorer and river traveler heading west or south. Even Abraham was here—Abraham Lincoln, in his legal capacity, tangled with the treacherous rapids and sunken-boat law suits.

I head south once more trying to figure out God's plan for this mighty river, the workhorse of the Midwest: a waterway for explorers; a tributary for smaller brooks and rivers; a system for joining rivers, draining the land to save its valleys; a power source to bring light; a vision from a higher source that we take for granted every day. Shame on us. If we would only plan our lives as carefully.

Arriving at St. Louis the Missouri joins, flows side by side as Mother Mississippi swells, as if with child. Here the Missouri's red waters run along with the clearer waters of the Mississippi. The waters mix. Now we have a "muddy Miss," a birthing of sorts.

As I travel, I hear songs written about the beauty of His River, poems inspired by the river's mystery, songs composed and novels written about God's miracles. At home I express some of these sacred musical praises for God's beautiful world as I sing in our St. Anne's church choir.

On the river's way to the ocean, the Mississippi bends, twists nervously on its sacred journey occasionally baptizing New Orleans, and its namesake, the state of Mississippi. I always wonder, did God promise His Ocean a fresh drink of water because the salty waters bring on thirst for a healthy drink? I think about this as I travel by New Orleans, built on the silt pouring from Mother Mississippi's apron, the muddy load of sand, mud and gravel helping to clear the river's throat. I hear another song, an anxious one from the ocean waves as the river widens, becomes generous, finally emptying its treasure into the anonymous waters of the sea. And yes, I realize, God thinks of everything. SJ

Jean Courtney Huber is an award-winning journalist and poet. She writes feature articles, nationally and internationally, as a newspaper correspondent. She is a member of St. Anne's Catholic Church.

Remember Thou, Creator!

POLLYANNA SEDZIOL

Their house is snug
but when the wind blows strong
it gets in a little
and she wonders how they fare
whose walls are thin
—or have no walls at all!

Their pantry has
too much of one thing
and not enough of another
every week, and every week
she shops, wondering how they fare
whose shelves are bare
—or have no shelves at all;

Their closets hold
changes through mid-week;
when outgrown or outworn
she wonders while replacing
how they manage, these newspaper
multitudes clothed by storm;

They contribute
a certain portion.
She grieves, knowing
no one can give enough
except God…Whom she believes
once donned humanity, Who lives
in the least of these.

Pollyanna Sedziol is seventy-five years old and has been writing poetry for more than fifty-five years! She devotes time to her loving family and to the Used Book Depository, a ministry that sends books and Bibles to the underserved.

Early Morning of the Soul

PATTY SMITHERMAN

[For Sue W.; From Eugene Bianchi's *Aging as a Spiritual Journey* p. 18-19]

The cloud obliterates the entire mountain to the west
Complete nothingness, white, framed by large green trees.
The clouds move in and blurs the trees
The morning sun from the east cannot compete
We are suspended
Reality is blurred
We hang between worlds
Yet we know the mountain exists
And so we wait
In faith.

Patty Smitherman is a former Spanish teacher, now a business owner, book lover, grandmother and spiritual-and-literal pilgrim, who walks portions of the Camino de Santiago when time allows. She is dedicated to interfaith and community work.

Hope

MARYSE G. COPANS

Trapped at dawn in a drop of dew on a wilted leaf;
silent;
tiny;
Stuck at dusk between the pages of a book on dying;
invisible;
ready.

Woven in the motions of a discombobulated world.
Entwined in the cries of migrating birds.
Rapture. Or despair.
Emerging from a grief that will not be silenced.
Rising from the ashes of a soul that refuses to die.
Abandon. Or faith.

Cradled at dusk in the folds of hands joined in prayer;
true;
vibrant.
Born at dawn from the knowing of a voice deep inside;
soft;
constant.

Maryse G. Copans is a translator by trade and writer at heart. She was born in Brussels, Belgium and has been living in the United States for over fifteen years. She writes, sings, and paints in the New York home she shares with her husband and two children. You can meet her on line at www.bluamaryllis.wordpress.com

CONNECT—

Join our Online Community!

Fellowship In Prayer maintains that peace in our world and hope for the future resides in a global community of prayer. When you join our Online Community you will be able to connect with others to share spiritual practices within and across religious traditions as a path to more effective and compassionate social action.

To access the FIP Online Community visit www.fellowshipinprayer.org

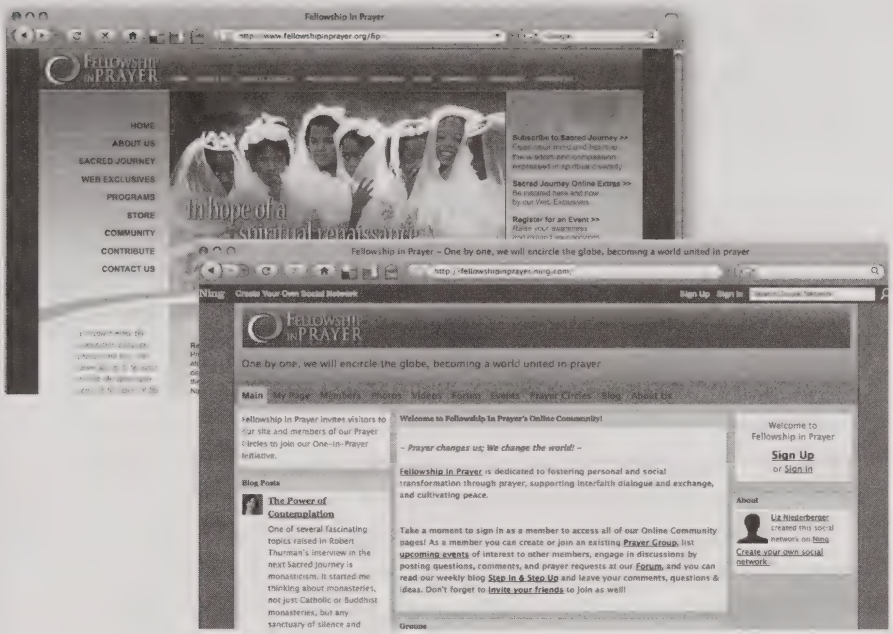
Using the right navigation bar, click "Join Online Community." Complete your member profile and you will be able to join an existing prayer circle or create one of your own, participate in One-in-Prayer, comment on our new weekly Blog—"Step In & Step Up," check our events calendar, and post your own events.

Please be sure to invite your family and friends!

Become One-In-Prayer!

Check the Fellowship In Prayer home page where a new One-In Prayer request will be posted each week, highlighting a particular social issue or community in need. Every day at noon, wherever you may be in the world, you are invited to pause for one minute of prayer for this special request. We know there is unique power in collectively focusing our spiritual attention and energy in this way.

To make it even easier for you to participate when you join Fellowship In Prayer's Online Community, you can elect to receive One-in-Prayer weekly email updates.



Step In & Step Up

An Occasional Blog

Be sure to read Fellowship In Prayer's blog authored by Patrick Dunn. Join him in reflecting on the interface between spiritual practice and deep personal and social transformation. Consider the profound wisdom rooted in religious diversity.

Patrick shares inspiration gleaned from reading *Sacred Journey*, from the depth and breadth of his own spiritual practice, from pressing social issues and—once you join the conversation—your questions and comments.

Step In to spiritual awareness and **Step Up** to meet today's challenges!

Haiku—The Sacred Art: A Spiritual Practice in Three Lines

MARGARET D. MCGEE

Maybe because we long for meaning in life, we human beings are strongly tempted to select, rearrange and shape what we see to make it fit our notions of how things ought to be. Writing haiku is a way to face down that temptation. For me, writing a haiku often means waking up again and again from a dream of my own devising, a dream in which I have twisted reality to boost the meaning I want it to have, whether I am aware that that is what I am doing or not. For me, writing haiku is a simple prayer.

Here is how you too can practice the sacred art of Haiku, a poetic form and a type of poetry from the Japanese culture.

To see and accept the world just the way it is can be is deeply healing—healing both to you and to the world. But before you can find your way to that healing, you will need to put away preconceived notions, let down your guard, and open up to what is really out there. That takes practice, and that is what this practice is all about. In this exercise, you will develop a list of facts—a list of things you perceive to be true. Then you will use your list of true things to write some haiku. In giving your respectful attention to one part of Creation, you will find all that's needed for your haiku to be a simple prayer of praise.

You will need paper and pencil and at least twenty minutes of quiet time. (It is important to give yourself the time you need and if you are doing this practice in a group, you may want some additional time to share results with each other.)

- If it is practical, go outside and find a place to sit comfortably. If not, get comfortable right where you are.
- Relax, breathe and look around.
- Jot down the first thing that catches your eye. Identify

it specifically. For example, rather than putting down "a tree" say which tree: "the holly tree on the corner."

- ❖ Spend a few minutes looking at what you noticed. Open up and take it in. Then write down one objective fact about it that you would not have noticed in a casual glance. You do not need a fancy fact, just a true one. For example, "Holly berries are red in the sun, but they appear black in the shade."
- ❖ Keep looking and keep writing until you have at least five facts that you would not have noticed about this object in a casual glance.
- ❖ If you are outside, write down one quick observation about the current weather. If you are inside, write down one quick observation about the environment of the room. For example, "afternoon sun," or "winter wind," or "fluorescent lights."
- ❖ From this material, write a haiku. For your first line use the one quick observation about the weather or the room. Then choose from among your list of facts to write the next two lines.

Tip: Do not try to cram too much into your haiku. You do not need a new image for each line. In fact, three images in a row can end up reading like a static list. Instead, let your first line set the scene and then choose one image for the rest of the poem. Write the image in one straight line at first, not worrying about how it will fall into two lines. Look for its essence. Keep the language clear and natural sounding, using no extra words. The first line usually contains five syllables, the second line, seven syllables, and the third line contains five syllables. Haiku does not rhyme.

- ❖ When you feel your image is true and complete, read it out loud. Is there a natural pause between two words? That might be a good place to break it into two lines. Or you might find another place to divide the

lines that feels right to you. Now you have the second and third lines of your poem. Try to keep the total length of your haiku to seventeen or fewer syllables.

- ❖ Finished? Take a moment to enjoy what you have written. If you are in a group, take time to share.

When you took the time to see more than comes across at first glance, were you surprised by anything you saw? Delighted? Did you see anything that felt like a reflection from your own life? You might see something that reminds you of a current concern or of a pattern of experiences or choices over many years. When you use that image in a haiku, the practice of writing haiku may affect how you feel about the issue in your life. Does this feel like a prayer to you?

In the coming weeks, you may want to delve into the images from this practice to write more haiku. Or you can repeat the practice anytime and anywhere you have time to open up to the world and see what is out there.

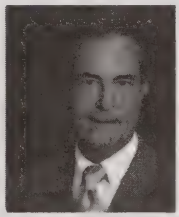
Margaret D. McGee is a writer, teacher and leader of spiritual workshops and retreats. Her website, www.IntheCourtyard.com hosts a forum for writing and sharing haiku in response to the sacred writings of world religions. This practice is excerpted and adapted from *Haiku-The Sacred Art. A Spiritual Practice in Three Lines*, part of *The Art of Spiritual Living Series* © Skylight Paths Publishing 2010, and used with permission. www.skylightpaths.com

New President to Lead FIP

We are pleased to announce that David Newton, Vice President of Palmer Square Management in Princeton, has been selected as the new Board President of Fellowship In Prayer.

David is enthusiastic about taking FIP to the next level and brings a wealth of experience including an international perspective to the task. He is an esteemed member of the business community and a person who is deeply committed to Judaism while promoting a spirit of inclusivity, respectful of all religions and cultures. David views his new role as an exciting opportunity to build bridges of understanding, harnessing the power of our diverse religious beliefs and spiritual practices at a time when it could not be more important.

David is assuming the leadership reins from Howard Ende who has served FIP exceedingly well for many years and will continue to be involved with the organization as a trustee. At the 60th Anniversary Concert in June, 2010, Howard was recognized for his outstanding leadership and commitment to FIP. Howard steered the organization through some challenging times and his dedication and expertise are greatly appreciated. Please join us in welcoming David by sending good thoughts and prayers his way as we explore exciting new directions for FIP's future.



Catchers

GERARD THOMAS STRAUB

A year after a magnitude 7.0 earthquake devastated Haiti, we take time to express our gratitude to all those who responded so quickly and gave so freely providing support, medical treatment, food, love and prayers. We take a moment to reflect.

Henri Nouwen, the celebrated spiritual writer and priest from the Netherlands whose personal spiritual journey brought him from teaching at the University of Notre Dame, Yale and Harvard to living in community with the developmentally disabled, had a fascination with circus trapeze artists. He was struck by their courage and how the fliers lived dangerously, dancing in air, until they were caught by the strong hands of their partners, the catchers. He saw their performance as a true feat of trust. Father Nouwen wrote:

> Before they are caught, they must let go. They must brave the emptiness of space. Living with this kind of willingness to let go is one of the great challenges we face. Whether it concerns a person, possession or personal reputation, in so many areas we hold on at all costs. We become heroic defenders of our dearly gained happiness. We treat our sometimes inevitable losses as failures in the battle for survival. The great paradox is that it is in letting go, we receive. We find safety in unexpected places of risk. And those who try to avoid risk, those who would try to guarantee that their hearts will not be broken, end up in a self-created hell.

It was something about letting go and being caught that captured Nouwen's attention. The flying trapeze artists became a powerful metaphor for the spiritual life, one that was especially useful to reassure those who were dying. Nouwen said, "Dying is

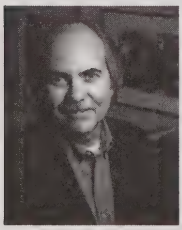
trusting the catcher."

For the purpose of Cité Soleil, there is no catcher. They are in free fall toward premature death. We need to become their catchers, holding out our hands, and in doing so, our limited and very conditional love becomes a conduit for God's unlimited and unconditional love to touch and heal the people of Cité Soleil.

Becoming catchers of the poor requires a deeper understanding of compassion. Nouwen wrote:

> Jesus' compassion is characterized by a downward pull. That is what disturbs us. We cannot even think about ourselves in terms other than an upward pull, upward mobility in which we strive for better lives, higher salaries and more prestigious positions. Thus we are deeply disturbed by a God who embodies a downward movement. Jesus' whole life and mission involved accepting powerlessness and revealing in this powerlessness the limitless love of God. Here we see what compassion means. It is not bending toward the under-privileged from a privileged position; compassion means going directly to those people and places where suffering is most acute and building a home there.

Wow . . . that's really a tough message. But if I really think about it, that is the message of Christmas. God became the child of a refugee couple forced to give birth in a barn surrounded by animals. That is downward mobility at its zenith. I don't mind coming to Cité Soleil for a week, but I can't imagine living there. Perhaps that is because I still can't grasp the full ramification of the fact that the cross is the intersection of love and suffering.



Gerard Thomas Straub, an award-winning author, photographer and filmmaker, is founder and former president of the San Damiano Foundation. After leaving a lucrative career producing daytime television, he chose to document the plight of poor people around the world. Excerpted from *Hidden in the Rubble: A Haitian Pilgrimage to Compassion and Resurrection* © 2010 Orbis Books and used with permission. www.orbisbooks.com

Children Left Behind

MARIE B. JACKSON-PEOPLES

The sun shone through the dusty blue sky in Johannesburg, South Africa that day as we entered an orphanage that housed about eighty children. They had been orphaned or abandoned as a result of the AIDS epidemic and/or violence. The teaching and training in the orphanage was centered on Christian beliefs. For me that provided a sense of gladness which soothed my spirit—no longer feeling as sad because these children had found a place of refuge from the harsh conditions of Soweto.

It was about noon and children were nearing the end of lunch. Crumbs, empty water and juice cups littered the floor and the wooden tables with benches attached. Large motor fans stirred hot air through an opened window of a large dining area. The smell of peanut butter filled my nostrils while little ones began to tug and push to get closer to us. They swarmed around and tightened the human circle that surrounded our group of ten. Eyes sparkled in faces full of big smiles with bread crumbs and spatters of milk stuck to their faces. At once, singing, chanting and clapping of hands began. It was as if the children were expecting us. Many stretched out their arms toward us. Their desires were so strong that we felt overwhelmed by their grandiose expression of love. Spontaneously, I reached out to touch one little girl. As I picked her up, I noticed that her under clothes were soiled, but she didn't seem the least bit concerned. Her yearning eyes told me that she felt relieved that someone had touched her. Someone came to see her. The workers moved quickly to pull the children away from the wide doorway. However, we signaled the leaders that it was okay for them to greet us. Suddenly, everyone was talking, children started grabbing our hands. We squatted down and they were able to touch our hats, pull off our sunshades and stare

intently into our eyes. Their soft brown velvet faces lit up when we started unpacking our bags and laying toys, clothes and toiletries on the tables.

In an adjoining room the preschoolers looked on with an expression of "Wow!" They moved slowly toward the tables. Many of them were shoeless, whether black, brown or white this is common practice with African children. Every child took at least one toy. The joy in the room was palatable and it wasn't just about toys. It was a feeling. The feeling I knew as a child. I wasn't forgotten. Somebody thought of me, I mattered. The singing, joyous children were then guided according to age to move into various rooms for quiet time. You didn't need to understand their language to know what they were singing, or to join in and sing along. In order to interact with all the children, we separated into small groups. Of course the language of toys brought children together from across the room. Most of them spoke two or more languages, which is another common practice in Africa; pulling different dialects together to form words. Workers requested that we read stories aloud. Books were available in each room.

Children sat anxiously in a circle after they selected a book. They crowded around like I was a gift from heaven. "Read the water book," said a small voice. The book shows pictures of lots of water. "I like cool water!" said the little boy. Raising the large book high got their attention. "Tell me why you like the water book." I asked. "I don't never see a lot of water . . . the boy in book is playing in water outside," said the boy. I folded my legs on the dark bare wooden floor and began to read with excitement. No one moved. Silence filled the room. The little ones wandering eyes of hope swallowed me up. At first, my voice crackled a bit. It took my total being to do my best. A breeze from an opened window began to cool the hot air as it carried faint sounds of music played in the distance. This music settled my spirit. When I finished reading the story book little arms flew up holding more books. "Read my book," shouted

each child. At the end of our first session, children folded their arms, bowed their heads and prayed a short prayer together.

"How do you teach children with multi-languages?" asked our group leader. "You talk, they hear, they see me, they watch me and they imitate you," the teacher responded. We rotated to observe other settings with older children. I watched with much anxiety while children were engaged, making towers with blocks and Legos, feeding baby dolls and using play phones to talk to each other. It was obvious that children had been taught to explore. I thought to myself, what is it going to look like in twenty years when you have a whole generation of people growing up without parents. How will they react to the world and how will the world receive them? They always smile even in the face of such despair. They don't know it as despair. It's their life and they are able to go on daily without running water and in many places with no electricity—and they deal with it—graciously.

During our two-week trip, we visited several child centers and orphanages and the entire time my mind was being drawn to the verse in Matthew 19:14, "But Jesus said, 'Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven." I witnessed God's love being expressed when I saw the children being shown by other children to share, to care for each other, and to be thankful for whatever they have. Preschoolers were eager to help babies and toddlers to walk, to get up and down. Older kids reconnected broken toys and assisted toddlers when trying to hold onto dolls, cars, balls and other toys that were difficult for the very young to handle.

As we left the orphanage for our final departure and board our van, children grabbed our clothes and they walked with us as far as it was allowed. We stood outside briefly and observed a nearby day care center. Young teens arrived to pick up children. To our surprise, a man drove up and gathered twelve children. He handed them to a teen-aged boy who rode on the

back of the dilapidated truck. One by one the children were passed to the boy. When the children stepped onto the opened truck they started waving and singing to us. The truck quickly drove out of sight, the children slid from side to side chanting and holding onto the sides of the truck. Now seated in our van, I glanced back at the orphanage and noticed a small hand just above the window sill. Was it the hand of the little boy who liked cool water I wondered? Our driver swirled, creating a large dust ball that blocked our view of the orphanage, but the pictures of my experience will be forever with me.

Looking back I ask myself "Has this trip changed me?" Yes, it has. I knew it would not be just an experience. I knew that I couldn't visit, return home and be the same. I knew there would be an ongoing heart connection. And that's exactly what's happened. I am in touch with this orphanage and I hope that my involvement will help some child in South Africa to have a brighter future because the plight of children living in South Africa moved us all. SJ

Marie B. Jackson-Peoples recently retired from the public school system of the District of Columbia, where she began her career as an elementary school teacher. During her tenure she earned an MS in Special Education and MS-Ed. Since retirement, Marie keeps active as a member of the board of Christian Education. She works part-time at her church managing the child development center and teaches a Sunday school class.

Finding God in Dissent

KATHARINE JEFFERTS SCHORI

I recently visited a church in Kentucky, where I heard something about the joys and challenges of life in rural and small communities. One man told of the Sunday he was scheduled to take a visiting priest to dinner after the service. He got a phone call during church, though, telling him that his bull had escaped from the pasture—and not for the first time. He was torn between competing duties—would he take the bull home or the priest?

Another man said he'd also had to deal with escaping bulls and horses and recounted the well-remembered occasion when the flock of chickens next door to the church was destroyed by a bunch of weasels.

I don't get to spend nearly enough time in the country. My encounters with wildlife and livestock are limited to what I see when I'm out running early in the morning—and in New York City, I'm lucky to see a pigeon or a seagull.

The gospels are filled with stories about Jesus and his encounters with other creatures in his environment. He uses images of the countryside freely—he talks about sheep and shepherds, wolves and sheep-stealers, as well as vineyards, harvests and fishing expeditions. He rides a donkey. And in the gospel of Luke, he calls Herod a fox.

Farmers and herders know about foxes, but they're not much of a threat to sheep or cattle or horses. They are only a threat to small livestock such as poultry and rabbits. And that's where Jesus goes with his image. "Go tell that fox Herod that I'm busy and I'll see him later. I will turn up in Jerusalem when it's time." It's a not-so-subtle way of putting King Herod in his place. Jesus has a pretty clear sense of what's waiting for him in Jerusalem, but he goes on his own

terms—when he's good and ready—not because some fox is chasing him. We think of foxes as clever, but Jesus is actually offering an insult. Foxes are small-time predators and it's a fitting image for Herod, who has to answer to Rome and definitely doesn't sit at the top of the food chain. Herod, the Roman-appointed "king of the Jews," is really just a petty harasser of the small and weak.

one—maybe most familiar in the verse in Compline, the ancient service of Christian evening prayer: "Keep us, O Lord, as the apple of your eye; hide us under the shadow of your wings" (Psalm 17:8), and it appears in several other psalms as well. Sheltering the chicks is one more example of God's care for the least and most vulnerable among us.

It's not a pretty thing when

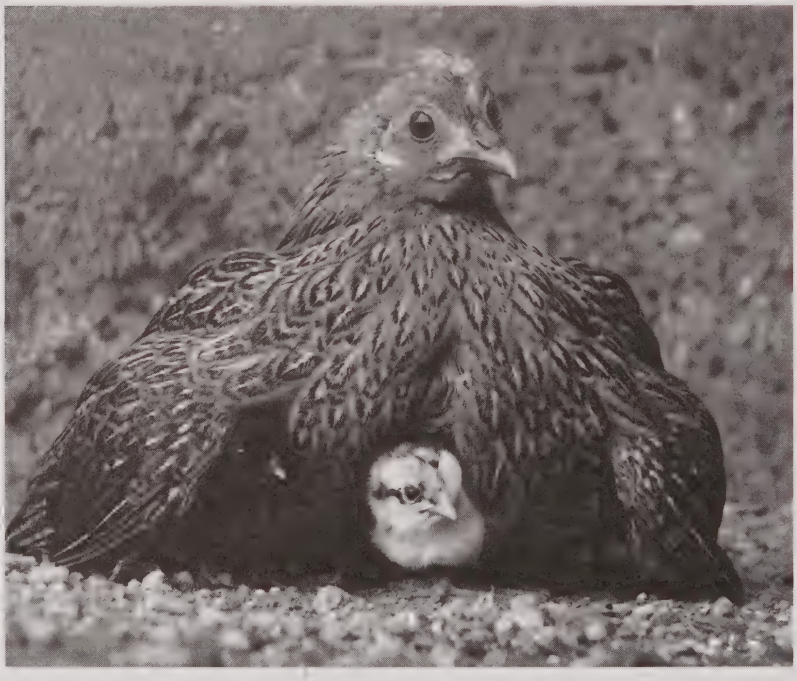
> Jerusalem, Jerusalem,
> how I've tried to gather you up,
> like a hen gathering her chicks
> under her wing. Luke 31:34

Jesus keeps pushing the image of the fox. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem," he laments as his disciples listen, "how I've tried to gather you up, like a hen gathering her chicks under her wings. But you weren't interested" (Luke 31:34; my translation). There's a fox in the henhouse, and Jesus, as mother hen, wants to gather up those vulnerable chicks and protect them. That image of God as a brooding hen is an ancient

a fox gets in the henhouse. Congregations wracked by the misbehavior of leaders know something about that, and in The Episcopal Church in the past few years there's been a fair amount of that. A fox sashays into the henhouse—a petty tyrant claims the divine right of judgment, power over life and death—and wreaks havoc with God's creatures. It happens around us all the time, when some human tyrant resolves to

control other people's lives and decide who's in and who's out of the community. Maybe the local bishop decides that he'll only permit priests to move into the diocese who agree with him on every important issue, no matter what their other gifts or shortcomings might be. Maybe a leader tries to expel other leaders who disagree on some issue, but are there to provide a balance in the system. The fox in the henhouse is at the root of all kinds of slavery and oppression and exploitation—from the bully in the schoolyard to leaders of nations who believe their government is a private bank account. Nothing keeps those tyrants in control except the fear of those beneath them.

In Liberia several years ago, the warlords were forced to the negotiating table by people who finally said, "No more—we've had enough." A large group of market women, sick and tired of being unable to feed their children and watching their loved ones die and disappear, finally got organized and said *no.* We're going to accompany you to the table, they insisted,



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and sit outside this meeting place, and we're going to stay here until you figure out how the people of this nation can live together in peace.

The Taliban, too, stay in power through intimidation. They shut down girls' schools and insist that women can't go out and lead ordinary lives in public. They bribe officials and shoot anybody who resists their authority. The violence in the Holy Land is rooted in similar kinds of fear-mongering on all sides. The rabid partisanship in our own Congress recently has a lot of fear wrapped up in it, as one faction or another insists that citizens will be gored by health care reform or that jobs or national security will be jeopardized by changes in immigration policies. Terrorists and tyrants derive their power from the fear they engender in others.

Jesus challenges the people of Jerusalem—and us—to take shelter in a place that isn't based in violence. When his listeners decline the challenge he says, "Well, it's your house—keep it—you just try and live in it." He's not abandoning them, but they're not going to notice him until they recognize that he comes from the owner of the henhouse. He comes from the God who dwells in Jerusalem's big house, the Temple. It's not Rome's henhouse—it belongs to the mother bird, and that Roman fox is not going to protect them.

The henhouse has room for all sorts of creatures if they're looking for a home. A skunk can find shelter there if it wants to, and a bull, and even a fox—if it'll give up devouring chicks.

God has always promised to gather us up under God's wings and protect us from foxes. And God's promises usually come in pretty surprising ways. In a deep and terrifying darkness, God promises Abraham as many descendants as the stars in the sky and a land for his people brimming with milk and honey (Genesis 22:17). And in the midst of that terrifying darkness and those amazing disturbing promises, God also gives Abraham the gift of sleep and dreaming, where he shelters under the wings of a trustworthy God.

Congregations troubled by authoritarian, abusive or self-

interested leadership won't heal until they let go of fear and terror and remember the trust and the love of God for all, even those who have injured them. Remember who came to warn Jesus about Herod. It was the Pharisees, the people Christians too often love to hate. It's a reminder that even our supposed enemies can be a gift. Our healing requires us to put away fear of those who have caused us hurt.

Consider the story of Christ Church in Lexington, Kentucky, where a couple of years ago parishioners celebrated a remarkable piece of healing. Members of First African Baptist Church joined members of Christ Church in letting go of some of the old hurt of slavery as they remembered and celebrated the life of the Reverend London Ferrell and his ministry among slaves, free blacks and even slaveholders in Lexington. He is the only African American buried in the old Episcopal Burying Grounds. Even in 1854, years before the Emancipation Proclamation, his burial there signaled the deep knowledge that we can and do shelter under the same wings of that ancient mother hen, the God who is making all things new.

Fear has no place in the henhouse and it won't build the reign of God. "*Fear is useless*," declares Jesus; "what is needed is trust" (Luke 8:50; my translation). We can only address the injustices in our parishes and our communities and our denominations, and welcome into the henhouse other chicks who need shelter, when we trust in God, cast out fear and name the fox for the petty tyrant he is.

The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori is the presiding Bishop and Primate of The Episcopal Church. She is the first female Primate in the Anglican Communion. Previous to her ordination she was an oceanographer with the National Marine Fisheries Service in Seattle, WA and a visiting assistant professor at Oregon State University's Dept. of Religious Studies. Excerpted from *The Heart Beat of God* © 2010 Skylights Paths and reprinted with permission. www.skylightspaths.com

The Heartbeat *of* God: *Finding the Sacred in the Middle of Everything*

BY KATHARINE JEFFERTS SCHORI

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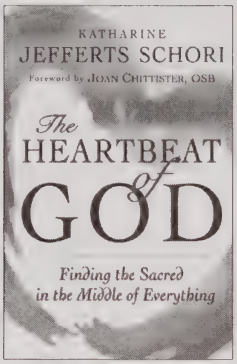

What responsibilities do people of faith have to help heal this fractured world? That is the question author Katherine Jefferts Schori presents in her book as she takes an up-close look at the major secular issues of our day; concerns faced by people all around the world. Jefferts Schori asks "whose job is it to fix these problems, especially since they have profoundly religious roots?" Reading this book you will examine through the lens of faith the connections we have as human beings with each other, as one nation with all other nations, as the human species with the whole of the environment. Indeed, as people of any faith tradition, we are called to tend to the needs of the least among us. She writes, "Our response to them must be the response of faith. God gives us a new heart to do this work and every time we gather to do it, God offers a pacemaker jolt to tweak our heart's rhythm. The challenge is this: will our hearts respond with a strengthened beat, in tune with God's own heartbeat, sending more life out into the world?" Jefferts Schori, an inspiring leader in world religion, confronts the most pressing moral and ethical challenges we face today and shows us how our decision can be—and should be—informed by our faith.

Faces in the Shadows

SUSAN GREGG-SCHROEDER

My husband and I recently returned from a long anticipated trip to Europe. In Amsterdam we were deeply moved by our visit to the Anne Frank House as it shows how one single person sharing her story can capture the suffering of countless others whose faces too often remain in the shadows. Anne Frank's father said he wants the House to inspire people to build a better world by working together against persecution, discrimination and fear. After completing our tour, we came to an exhibit that included a short, interactive video clip depicting various current issues or events and offering viewers the opportunity to vote "yes" or "no" to the questions posed. We found it difficult to respond because answering involved weighing the rights of one group over another. Should public servants be allowed to wear religious symbols while on duty or should Holocaust deniers be allowed to publish their opinions on the Internet? Do we support those who reinforce stigma and fear about mental illness even if the persecutors are acting out of fear and ignorance? In a democratic society, do we protect the civil rights of all persons including those who preach hatred and incite violence? It is no easy matter to determine how far someone's freedom extends before it infringes on the rights of others in the diverse and complex world in which we live. What we came away with is the need to really listen with respect to the stories and experiences of others. Our visit to the Anne Frank House also affirmed the power of one person sharing his or her story and how, through education, we can work together to fight stigma, discrimination and fear.

A frequent contributor to *Sacred Journey*, Rev. Susan Gregg-Schroeder founded Mental Health Ministries to provide educational resources on spirituality and mental illnesses. Visit www.MentalHealthMinistries.net.

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